

# Bill Fromhold

State Representative

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## CAPITAL LETTER:

A report from  
your Legislature

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**Dear Fellow Citizen:**

**It is a privilege to represent our southwestern Clark County communities in your Washington State Legislature.**

Our major legislative work is finished – at last. I'm honored to share this report on the new operating budget and the other big issues we addressed this session.

One "big issue," for example, is economic development. Clearing the way for quality, long-lasting business development has always been one of my major objectives in the Legislature – the 2003 session just the same as any other year. Making improvements in early-childhood education also ranks as a significant objective on my Olympia agenda year in and year out.

**Thank you so much for your continuing interest and participation in the process.**

**As always, I ask that you stay in touch. Seeing what you think about these and other issues helps me do a better job representing our communities and neighborhoods. Ann Tjersland, my assistant, and I always look forward to reviewing your comments.**

**Respectfully,**

**Bill Fromhold**  
State Representative  
49<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

## Operating budget:

To reach agreement  
means deciding where  
we can and should reach

**A few folks sure like to extol extremist points of view when the conversation turns to politics. But whether these views come from the left or from the right, they misrepresent the role of government.**

I don't think any so-called "conservative" wants to toss poor people out into the street. And no, I don't think any so-called "liberal" wants to tax people out of their house and home, either. **For me, it's about deciding how high we should reach.**

Take the state's new operating budget, for instance.

We went overtime this session to achieve agreement on balancing the 2003-2005 biennial budget. I was involved in negotiating this revised plan. In the end, it came down to finding a fair balance necessary to solve a \$2.7-billion-budget shortfall. In my opinion, we balanced – as well as we possibly could – the supply of essential human services with the demand of spending cuts.

**June 2003**

# Representative Bill Fromhold

A budget must provide strong and dependable delivery of public education, as well as basic programs for public health and safety. Further, we need to advance a quality, lasting plan of economic development.

## No general tax increase

**After intense negotiations, we found compromise on a new state budget – a compromise that does not include any general tax increase.**

This new budget does include appropriate funding for children's health programs; the Basic Health Program for low-income, working citizens, and assistance for adults whose health condition prevents them from holding a job.

This compromise provides a small raise for home-care workers. First-year teachers will see a slight salary boost, too. The budget keeps undergraduate tuition in colleges and universities below the level our counterparts in the Senate originally sought.

**In legislation passed early this year in the House, we made it perfectly clear that government efficiency had better be the rule – not the exception.**

## Development:

Attracting – and keeping – one of our state's big growth industries

**High-quality economic development is absolutely indispensable for our Clark County communities and neighborhoods – especially with our unemployment rate recently topping nine percent.**

Quality, lasting business development is a good thing. I worked to get that point across again this year in the state capital. I'm proud we approved strong encouragement both for new semiconductor businesses to put down roots here – and for existing semiconductor businesses to cultivate their Clark County crop.

**Our 21st-century economy demands a 21st-century tax system – it's as simple as that.** The plan we guided through the process establishes a preferential business-and-occupation-tax rate for these companies.

Our region already has the foundation to grow an even stronger semiconductor sector. But I argued that we need to adopt these incentives if we expect our state to keep the businesses we have and to attract new ones.

## At-risk of losing our lead

We must face the fact that we're at-risk of losing our once-large lead in the rivalry for semiconductor businesses. Competition in the world market, to be sure, has grown by leaps and bounds.

**Thousands of jobs are at stake in this competition.** We're talking about good-paying jobs in a healthy, environmentally friendly industry. And we're also talking about tens of millions of dollars in revenue for our economy.

This year's semiconductor measure includes strict review and reporting to hold the businesses accountable for actual job creation – and to make sure their credits and exemptions in the new tax program are used and applied correctly.

## Learning reading:

Intensive instruction is a good way to make sure our kids compete

**In order to get off to a strong start toward the rest of their education, kids must learn to read well as soon as possible.**

I won support for a measure to try out an early, intensive approach in the teaching of reading and language skills.

The legislation authorizes pilot projects in two school districts, one of which is probably going to be in the Vancouver schools.

School districts participating in the early-reading pilot will employ accepted, research-based methods to find youngsters on the edge of falling behind in reading and language skills. For sure, parents will be involved in their child's program right from the start.



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Schools outside Washington in which this type of early-intervention program has been established have shown impressive results. They've been particularly successful with their young people who were on the brink of falling behind – and who would then have to play catch-up with other kids (probably for the rest of their school years).

**Early intervention with children having reading problems is a far better strategy than remediation. The idea is for our schools to make doubly sure their students are good learners today – rather than have to deal with their learning problems tomorrow.**

## Pension policies:

Retirees deserve a stronger voice in decision-making process

I won support for a key measure involving teacher and public-employee pensions.

The legislation creates the Select Committee on Pension Policy to investigate strategies for improving pension policies. Terms of this new law also make sure that opinions of retirees are included in the committee's work.

This bill is a step forward – a balanced policy that deals with the very serious issues regarding pension governance. Citizens involved in this issue have worked for years to come up with a policy acceptable to all – and this measure reflects their work.

## Capital budget:

Priorities include Clark College, community center and local parks

**The new capital budget features projects sought for Washington State University Vancouver, Clark College, and other important local interests.**

Funds are lined up for the Clark Center at WSU Vancouver – as well as several Clark College projects. This construction budget will help replace Stout Hall on the main Clark College campus, for example, and sustain work on the beginning phase of the college's east-county satellite.

The capital budget also includes funding for facility-preservation and electrical work at the State School for the Blind, and a state crime lab in Vancouver.

The Firstenburg Community Center will realize financial assistance from the capital budget. Several parks in Southwest Washington are also helped.

**The construction projects arising out of the capital budget translate into good, family-wage jobs for hundreds of citizens in our communities.**

**We need to make this kind of investment today in order to make sure we live in solid communities tomorrow.**

## Additional bills:

Here are the other measures I prime-sponsored this session

### ■ Illegally parked vehicles

This new state law allows police officers to arrange prompt and safe removal of vehicles that are illegally parked. For a vehicle to be considered "illegally parked," it must be interfering with the intended use of the parking zone in which it is parked.

### ■ Construction liability

This measure sets seven affirmative defenses a builder can assert in an action based on activities covered in construction-claims law – while clarifying consumer responsibility and protecting consumer interests. Successful assertion of any of these defenses may excuse the builder from any obligation, damage, loss, or liability.

Many small businesses are being forced under by the high cost of liability insurance. Many of the businesses that survive have to pass their increased cost on to consumers. This new policy helps create more certainty for insurers, which means more affordable premiums.

### ■ Public-retirement systems

This policy involves members of Plan 3 in the Public Employee Retirement System, Plan 3 in the School Employee Retirement System, and Plan 3 in the Teacher Retirement System who move to another state and wish to enroll in that state's pension program.

The new law says that members who have withdrawn defined contributions from their accounts may choose to irrevocably waive all rights to a defined benefit in order to qualify for enrollment in the pension system in their new state.

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### Transportation:

Accountability is the key  
in this year's bipartisan plan

**Transportation has been a challenge in the state of Washington for as long as Washington has been a state.**

This year, we sought and finally found a fair and balanced compromise. The revenue and investment plan for transportation includes an investment of more than \$4.17 billion on highway and other projects needed all across our state.

Going into this year's legislative session, passage of this bipartisan transportation plan was the top priority of the Competitiveness Council.

The council is made up of Washington citizens representing the business and civic arenas – and they're dedicated to boosting our economic future.

**Projects in southwestern Washington tentatively scheduled include:**

- Rail-bypass and elimination of grade crossing for West 39th Street.
- New interchange at Highway 500 and 112th Avenue-Gher Road.

- Design improvement for Northeast 42nd Avenue and 54th Avenue.
- Design and land purchase to widen Highway 502 between Interstate 5 and Battle Ground.
- Ramp for northbound Interstate 205 at Mill Plain Boulevard to Northeast 112th Avenue.
- Interstate 5 and Highway 502 interchange in the area of Northeast 219th Street.
- Reconstruction of interchange at Northeast 134th Street (the Interstate 205 junction).
- Third lane in each direction to Interstate 5 from Northeast 99th Street to Northeast 134th Street.

A five-cent gas-tax increase is included in the transportation legislation – the first increase in the state's portion of the gas tax in more than 12 years. Since the last gas-tax increase, our Washington population has grown by 20 percent.

Terms of this transportation package will spark creation of upward of 3,200 jobs a year for the next 10 years.

Now, remember that "transportation" doesn't simply mean building a bunch of new roads. The 2003 plan carries funding to retrofit school buses, for one thing, as a way to help reduce air pollution. This legislation also funds transit and vanpool programs, as well as programs involving transit, passenger rail, and commute-trip reduction.

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